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Employment and Persons with Disabilities in Canada

In this 18th edition of the CCSD's *Disability Research Information Sheets*, we provide various employment-related statistics for persons with disabilities in Canada, using data from the 2001 Participation and Activity Limitation Survey (PALS),[1] the 2001 Workplace and Employee Survey (WES),[2] and the 2001 Census of the Population.[3] We also provide a brief summary of some of the findings of a report entitled, *Supports and Services for Adults and Children Aged 5-14 with Disabilities in Canada*, and in particular, the requirements and unmet needs for employment supports and services. This longer report was commissioned by the Federal-Provincial-Territorial Ministers Responsible for Social Services and released on December 3, 2004. (www.socialunion.ca/pwd_e.html)

[1] The Adult PALS is a post-censal survey, that is, a survey that uses a Census question to identify the target population. It was conducted in 10 provinces and contains rich disability-specific information, such as severity rate and type of disability.

[2] The 2001 WES surveyed employed individuals and their employers. Excluded from this survey were workplaces involved in: public administration; crop and animal production; fishing, hunting, and trapping; private households; religious organizations; and workplaces in the Territories. Because public administration was excluded, there is a heavy emphasis on private sector employers. The 2001 WES surveyed over 20,000 employees in more than 5,000 workplaces.

[3] Screening questions concerning "activity limitations" are contained in the Census Long Form, which was distributed to one in five Canadians.

Employment Supports

Modified Work Structures:
Among *employed* persons with disabilities, 15% report that they need some type of "modified work structure" in or around the workplace. This would include structures such as handrails/ ramps; accessible parking; accessible elevators; modified workstations; accessible washrooms; accessible transportation; and "other" structures. The most commonly required work structure is a modified workstation (required by 7%), followed by accessible parking (5%).[4] [Note: Some individuals require modifications to more than one structure.]

The rate of requirement for modified work structures in or around the workplace is even higher among persons with disabilities who are *unemployed*. In fact, unemployed workers with disabilities are nearly twice as likely (28%) as those who are employed to require some type of modified work structure.[5] It may be that this requirement for modified workplace structures leaves an individual more vulnerable to job loss or to greater difficulty in finding employment.

Work Aids or Job Modifications:
In addition to modifications to work structures – which may be thought of as infrastructure changes – some individuals have requirements for more personal or individualized supports, which are referred to as "work aids or job modifications." These would include: job redesign (modified or different duties); modified work hours; human supports (such as readers, sign language interpreters, job coaches, personal assistants); technical aids (such as a voice synthesizer, TTY or TDD, infrared system, portable note-takers); a computer with Braille, large print, speech access, or a scanner; communication aids (such as Braille or large-print reading material or recording equipment); and "other."

Employed persons with disabilities are more likely to require work aids or job modifications than they are to require modified work structures. About 30% of employed persons with disabilities require some type of work aid or job modification, with modified work hours (required by 19% of employed persons with disabilities) and job redesign (required by 17%) being the most commonly cited.[6]

Among *unemployed* persons with disabilities, 56% say they require some type of work aid or job modification, with job redesign (required by 42%) and modified work hours (35%) being the most commonly cited.[7] This suggests that a requirement for work aids or job

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[4] Among employed persons with disabilities, rates of requirement for other structures are as follows: accessible elevators (4%); accessible washrooms (4%); accessible transportation (3%); handrails/ramps (3%); and "other" (1%).

[5] Among unemployed persons with disabilities, rates of requirement for specific structures are as follows: accessible parking (12%); modified workstations (12%); accessible elevators (10%); accessible washrooms (8%); accessible transportation (8%); handrails/ramps (6%); and "other" (1%).

[6] Among employed persons with disabilities, rates of requirement for other specific work aids or job modifications are: "other" (5%); human supports (3%); technical aids (2%); and computer with Braille (1%).

[7] Among unemployed persons with disabilities, rates of requirement for other specific work aids or job modifications are: human supports (10%); "other" (6%); and technical aids (4%).

modifications may be linked to job instability. [Note: Some individuals require more than one type of aid or modification.]

Unmet Needs

Among *employed* persons with disabilities, the greatest rate of unmet need for modified work structures is accessible transportation – 26% of those who require it, don't have it. Roughly one in five who require handrails/ ramps, accessible parking, accessible elevators, or accessible workstations have an unmet need, and 12% who require accessible washrooms have an unmet need. In terms of sheer numbers, the greatest unmet need is for modified workstations (an unmet need for 10,900 persons) and for accessible parking (unmet need for 8,140 persons).

Among this group, the greatest *rate* of unmet need for work aids or job modifications is for "other" (unspecified) work aids (29% with this unmet need) and for technical aids (27% unmet need). In terms of *numbers*, the greatest unmet need is for modified work hours (unmet need for 152,280) and job redesign (unmet need for 138,190).

Why is workplace accommodation so problematic?

Our findings from the 2001 PALS indicate that there is a fairly high requirement for some type of workplace accommodation among those with disabilities, but these requirements are often for things that do not seem difficult to provide. Since modified workstations and accessible parking are the most commonly required structures, and modified work hours and job redesign are the most commonly required aids, one might think that these items would be relatively simple to provide. Instead, however, a fairly high number of individuals have unmet needs for these items, and these unmet needs can act as major barriers to their labour force participation and economic security.

In a recent report by the Canadian Abilities Foundation (CAF) using data gathered specifically for their study, similar conclusions are drawn. While the requirement for workplace accommodations is fairly high,[8] these accommodations are usually not terribly costly. They estimated that "annual workplace accommodation costs are under $1,500 for almost all workers who have a disability."[9] According to their study, for just over half of those requiring some type of accommodation, the estimated cost would be less than $500 per person per year; for one-third, the cost would be $500 to $1,500 per year; and for 16%, the cost was estimated at over $1,500. These costs are probably much lower than many employers realize. For many persons with disabilities, an employer's reluctance to provide accommodation on the job can be extremely disheartening and frustrating: "Employers are still ignorant about what it takes to hire and accommodate a person with a disability."[10]

Despite our findings that workers with disabilities often require some flexibility in the workplace, there is evidence that they may actually face *less* flexibility than

[8] In this study, the rate of requirement is higher than was found in our study. However, in the CAF study, the population surveyed included both those who were working and those who were not working (some of whom were not actively looking for work but had worked within the last five years). This difference would tend to increase the proportion of those who might have a requirement.

[9] Canadian Abilities Foundation. *Neglected or Hidden*. Toronto: CAF, 2004, p. 9.

[10] Ibid.

do workers without disabilities. In the CAF report, strategies such as "flexible work hours" and "working at home" are cited as methods of accommodating many workers with disabilities. However, using data from the 2001 WES, we find that workers without disabilities are more likely than those with disabilities to be able to work from home (23.6%, compared to 15.9%). Workers without disabilities are also more likely to report having flexible work hours (35.5% compared to 29.5% for workers with disabilities).

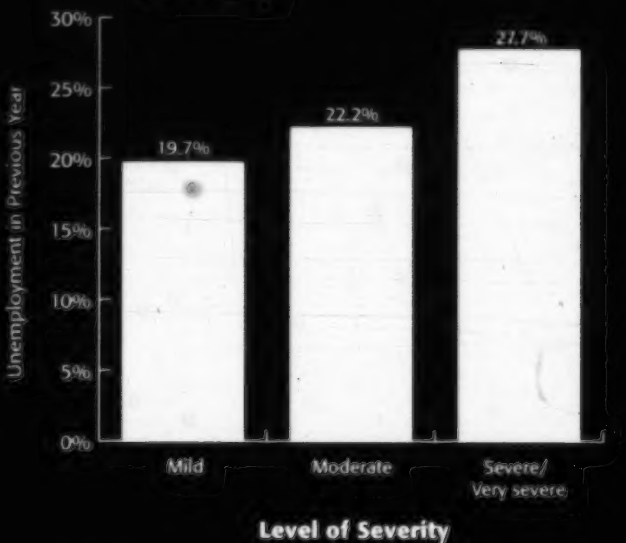
These differences may be related to the kinds of jobs or types of employers that the workers have, or they may be related to differences in the manner in which workers with and without disabilities are treated. Certainly, these findings suggest that there may be room for greater flexibility for workers with disabilities.

There are also some interesting findings coming out of the United States. Since 1984, the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy, has provided a toll-free service known as the Job Accommodation Network (JAN). JAN provides advice regarding workplace accommodations to persons with disabilities and to employers. In a one-year period between October 1994 and September 1995, JAN received over 80,000 calls. Of the businesses seeking advice on workplace accommodation, the solution for 19% had no cost attached; for another 50%, the cost of accommodation was between $1 and $500. Only 3% reported a cost of more than $5,000. Even more interesting is the fact that the majority of these businesses also reported receiving some type of financial return as a result of implementing the workplace accommodation. In fact, the average return was $28.69 for every $1 spent on accommodation. (For more information, see www.dol.govodep/archives/ek96/ benefits.htm.)

Labour Force Instability

According to the 2001 PALS, just under one-quarter (22.3%) of employed persons with disabilities reported having had at least one period of unemployment in the previous year. There was only a slight variation by gender – with women at 23.1% and men at 21.6% – and by level of education.[11] However, both the worker's age and severity of disability

Chart 1 **Workers with Disabilities who Experienced Unemployment in the Previous Year, by Severity of Disability**



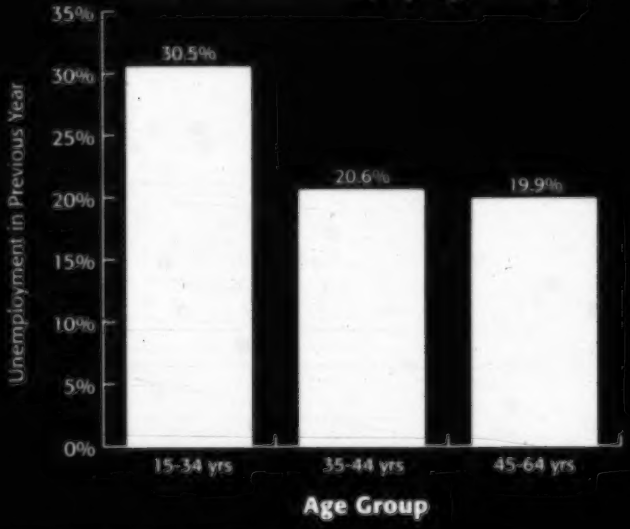
Source: Calculations by the CCSD using data from Statistics Canada's Participation and Activity Limitation Survey (PALS), 2001.

[11] Less than high school, 23.6%; high school graduate, 22.7%; and post-secondary graduate, 21.7%.

appear to leave persons with disabilities more vulnerable to unemployment. For example, 27.7% of workers with severe or very severe disabilities faced unemployment within the previous year, compared with 22.2% among those with moderate disabilities, and 19.7% of those with mild disabilities.

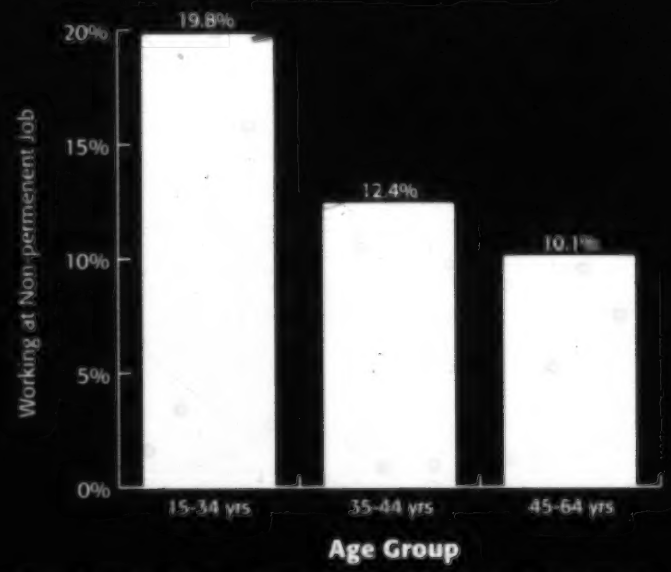
As well, younger workers with disabilities are more likely than their older counterparts to face unemployment. As seen below, 30.5% of workers aged 15 to 34 with disabilities faced unemployment within the previous year, compared with 20.6% of those aged 35 to 44, and 19.9% of those aged 45 to 64. As documented here and in other studies, younger workers with disabilities tend to face higher levels of disadvantage in the labour market in a number of areas, and facing this type of disadvantage early in life can have a cumulative negative impact on one's career possibilities.

Chart 2 **Workers with Disabilities who Experienced Unemployment in the Previous Year, by Age Group**



Source: Calculations by the CCSD using data from Statistics Canada's Participation and Activity Limitation Survey (PALS), 2001.

Chart 3 **Workers with Disabilities in Non-permanent Jobs, by Age Group**



Source: Calculations by the CCSD using data from Statistics Canada's Participation and Activity Limitation Survey (PALS), 2001.

For 13% of workers with disabilities, their employment is not permanent in nature.[12] There is only a slight variation by level of severity and by gender, but age is an important factor: 19.8% of those aged 15 to 34 worked at a non-permanent job, compared with 10.1% of those aged 45 to 64.[13]

[12] Non-permanent jobs include seasonal work, contract or term work, casual jobs, work done through a temporary help agency, and the like.

[13] Among those aged 35 to 44, 12.4% were in non-permanent jobs.

Labour Market Activity

Using data from the 2001 Census, we examined labour force activity over a one-year period for the working-age population (aged 15 to 64 years). At the national level, it is clear that adults with disabilities are considerably less likely than their non-disabled counterparts to have a full-time, full-year work profile. They are also much more likely to have had no activity in the paid labour force at all.

Men without disabilities are the most likely to have been employed full-time for the full year, and women with disabilities are the least likely to have this profile. For example, 53.2% of men without disabilities had full-time, full-year employment in 2000, compared with 34.9% of men with disabilities, 37.4% of women without disabilities, and 23.2% of women with disabilities.[14] Similarly, 12.8% of men without disabilities did not work at all in 2000, compared with 36.5% of men with disabilities, 22.5% of women without disabilities, and 46.7% of women with disabilities.

This general relationship held true within every province and territory, although it was more pronounced in some than in others. Table 5 summarizes the percentage of men and women, with and without disabilities, who worked full-time for the full-year in 2000, by province and territory.

It is in the territories that the percentages of full-time, full-year work are most alike among adults with and without disabilities. In the Northwest Territories, for example, the rate of working full-time, full-year for men without disabilities is 1.2 times that of men with disabilities; for women, the corresponding figure is 1.3 times. There are similar relationships in the Yukon

Table 4 **Work Activity for Women and Men With and Without Disabilities, 2000**

	Worked 49 to 52 weeks		Worked less than 49 weeks		
	Full-time, Full-year	Part-time, Full-year	Full-time, Part-year	Part-time, Part-year	Did not work during year
Women with Disabilities	23.2%	6.7%	12.5%	11.0%	46.7%
Men with Disabilities	34.9%	2.9%	18.4%	7.2%	36.5%
Women without Disabilities	37.4%	9.1%	17.0%	14.1%	22.5%
Men without Disabilities	53.2%	3.5%	22.2%	8.3%	12.8%

Source: Calculations by the CCSD using data from Statistics Canada's Census, 2001.

[14] More investigation using age breakdowns needs to be done on these data in the future. Persons with disabilities tend, on average, to be older than those without disabilities. Part – but certainly not all – of these differences are likely due to early retirement of a higher proportion of persons with disabilities. However, even if we consider that, due to differences in the age distribution of the two populations, persons with disabilities may be less likely to have been employed because they were retired, we must remember that a certain proportion of that retirement may not be entirely voluntary. It is likely that many individuals retire from the labour market due to disability.

and in Nunavut, although in Nunavut the rate of full-time, full-year work is low for all groups. Rates of full-time, full-year work among those with and those without disabilities were least alike in Quebec and in Newfoundland and Labrador. In those two provinces, adults without disabilities were about twice as likely as those with disabilities to have worked full-time for the full year.

In every province and territory in 2000, persons with disabilities were more likely than those without disabilities to have had no employment during the year. Here again, the gap varied somewhat by geography. Among men in Prince Edward Island, for example, the percentage of those with disabilities who were without employment for the full year was nearly four times (3.89) that of men without disabilities (44.4% compared with 13.4%). And in New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Quebec, and Ontario, the percentage of men with disabilities who were without work for the year was over three times that of their non-disabled counterparts. The gap was smallest in Nunavut. Among women, the gap between those with and those without disabilities was smaller than it was among men. Like men, however, the differences were greatest in Prince Edward Island and smallest in Nunavut.

Table 5 **Per cent of Persons,* With and Without Disabilities, who Worked Full-time Full-year in 2000, by Gender and Province/Territory**

	With Disabilities		Without Disabilities	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
CAN.	23.2%	34.9%	37.4%	53.2%
NFLD & LB	15.0%	17.1%	28.1%	34.7%
PEI	22.4%	30.1%	36.0%	44.7%
NS	18.6%	28.9%	34.9%	49.3%
NB	19.0%	28.1%	35.2%	46.7%
QC	16.6%	24.8%	35.3%	50.1%
ON	24.8%	38.3%	40.3%	57.2%
MB	28.3%	41.2%	40.6%	57.3%
SK	27.6%	41.0%	38.2%	53.9%
AB	28.2%	43.3%	38.6%	57.0%
BC	22.6%	33.5%	33.4%	48.4%
YK	34.5%	34.3%	41.9%	44.8%
NWT	33.8%	42.1%	42.6%	50.2%
NU	19.8%	27.0%	28.2%	36.3%

* Persons aged 15 to 64

Source: Calculated by the CCSD using data from Statistics Canada's 2001 Census.

Chart 6 **Per cent of Persons,* With and Without Disabilities, who Did Not Work During the Year 2000, by Gender and Province/Territory**

	With Disabilities		Without Disabilities	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
CAN.	46.7%	36.5%	22.5%	12.8%
NFLD & LB	61.0%	55.1%	32.3%	19.1%
PEI	38.8%	31.0%	14.4%	8.0%
NS	53.6%	44.4%	24.3%	13.4%
NB	51.4%	42.4%	22.8%	12.5%
QC	59.3%	49.6%	27.0%	15.7%
ON	46.1%	35.3%	20.6%	11.5%
MB	39.2%	29.4%	18.9%	10.7%
SK	36.9%	28.3%	18.9%	11.7%
AB	35.6%	23.7%	17.5%	8.3%
BC	43.1%	33.4%	23.1%	14.2%
YK	21.5%	18.5%	11.9%	8.5%
NWT	29.7%	22.1%	17.0%	11.2%
NU	42.2%	29.0%	29.2%	21.5%

* Persons aged 15 to 64

Source: Calculated by the CCSD using data from Statistics Canada's 2001 Census.

In our next *Disability Research Information Sheet*, we examine disability types and combinations of disability types. We also provide data on employment and disability type.

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